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Afghanistan: The Babrak Government

An Intelligence Memorandum

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PA 79-10610
December 1979

Copy 122

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Afghanistan: The Babrak Government (b)(3)

Summary

The Soviet-installed government of Prime Minister Babrak Karmal is dominated by members of his Parcham faction of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, but leftist military officers who overthrew President Daoud in April 1978 and installed the first PDPA government are also important participants. Many of the Cabinet members and the Parchamists who are helping with security in Kabul have been hiding in the Soviet Embassy in Afghanistan for up to a year. Included in this category are Sherjan Mazduryar, Minister of Transport, and Revolutionary Council member Mohammad Aslam Watanjar, who reportedly fled to the Soviet Embassy after the mid-September coup in which Amin deposed Taraki. (b)(3)

There are also several men in the Cabinet who have not been closely tied to either Parcham or the military leftists in the past, and a few who seem to have been closer to the party's Khalq faction—headed by the late Presidents Taraki and Amin—than to Parcham. Almost all, however, seem to have had a good reason to hate Amin and to have cooperated in his overthrow. (b)(3)

So far the Babrak government has announced a partial list of the Cabinet and some members of the Revolutionary Council (in theory a supervisory, quasi-legislative body) and publicly designated three individuals as "party members," a term possibly intended to recognize their importance without granting them any authority. (C)

The most important Cabinet positions appear to have been given to some of the least important men. The two Deputy Prime Ministers and the Defense, Interior, Finance, and Foreign Ministers are all men of relatively little importance and presumably can be controlled easily. Far more important individuals—such as Abdul Qader, Nur Ahmad Nur, and Mohammad Aslam Watanjar have not been included in the Cabinet, although they are members of the Revolutionary Council. (b)(3)

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The author of this paper is *of the Near East - South Asia Division, Office of Political Analysis.*

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Afghanistan:
The Babrak Government (b)(3)

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The Parchamists

Babrak Karmal, Prime Minister, Secretary General of the People's Democratic Party, President of the Revolutionary Council

Babrak, as he is usually known, is the dominant figure in the new Afghan Government. He was born in 1929 to a prominent Pushtun family—his father was a general and provincial governor—and was educated at Kabul University. He was jailed for political agitation in 1952 and while in prison fell under the influence of Mir Akbar Khaibar, a leading Afghan Communist theoretician. Until Khaibar's murder in April 1978, Babrak was generally considered to be a front man for his mentor. (b)(3)

Khaibar's Parcham faction, unlike Taraki's Khalquists, advocated participation in the political process, and in 1965 Babrak was one of three Parchamists elected to Parliament. His activities in Parliament probably made him better known to the public than any other Afghan Marxist. He instigated serious student disorders that forced the resignation of Prime Minister Yusuf in 1965 and was hospitalized for six weeks in 1966 after a beating by conservative deputies. He was reelected to Parliament in 1969 with student support. High points of his second term were a major speech during a confidence debate in 1971 in which he attacked the royal family and the United States, and a demonstration—perhaps the largest ever in Afghanistan—he organized in 1973 to protest a water-sharing agreement with Iran. (b)(3)

Following the overthrow of the monarchy in 1973, Babrak refrained from public activity until the murder of Khaibar in April 1978. His emotional funeral speech—surprisingly broadcast by the government—and the major demonstration to protest the killing led to the arrest of Marxist leaders. The arrests in turn led to the Marxist coup. (b)(3)

As the leader of the Parcham faction, Babrak became Deputy Prime Minister in the new government. He was quickly outmaneuvered by the Khalqist leaders—President Taraki and Foreign Minister Amin—and in July was exiled as Ambassador to Czechoslovakia. He was ordered to return home to stand trial for coup plotting in September, but remained outside Afghanistan—primarily in Prague—until his installation as Prime Minister in December 1979. (b)(3)

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Anahita Ratebzad, Minister of Education

Anahita, born in 1929, claims to be the first Afghan woman to be educated in the United States. She studied nursing in Chicago when she and her husband—Babrak's uncle—lived there in 1951-53. She is an excellent and acerbic public speaker. In public she appears to be a fiery radical leftist and feminist, but in private she is reportedly pleasant, reasonable, and thoughtful.

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Anahita attended Kabul University Medical College, but it is not known whether she received a degree. She taught there and at a nursing school before being elected to Parliament in 1965.

(b)(3)

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When the Marxists seized power, she was named Minister of Social Affairs, but in July 1978 she was reassigned as Ambassador to Yugoslavia. She apparently remained in Eastern Europe when she was recalled to stand trial.

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Lt. Col. Sherjan Mazduryar, Minister of Transport

Mazduryar, about 40, at one time seemed to be completely trusted by Taraki and Amin, and simultaneously held the politically most important commands in the Army—the Army Corps in the Kabul area, the Kabul Garrison, and one of the two armored brigades near Kabul. When his apparently close friend Watanjar was made Chief of Staff, Mazduryar replaced him as Interior Minister. It has never been clear whether his appointment to this key ministry reflected continuing trust or was designed to deprive him of control of troops in the Kabul area. Although he was believed loyal to Amin, the latter apparently suspected he was involved in Soviet efforts to eliminate Amin, and in July 1979 Amin made him Minister of Frontier Affairs, one of the least important posts in the Cabinet. Mazduryar went into hiding when Taraki was overthrown. (b)(3)

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Colonel Mohammad Rafi, Minister of National Defense

Rafi, about 35, participated in the armored attack on the palace in April 1978 and was made Minister of Public Works. Although Rafi was not important enough to be a serious threat, he was arrested for antigovernment plotting in August 1978. (b)(3)

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Sayed Mohammad Gulabzoi, Minister of Interior

Gulabzoi, about 30, is a former enlisted aircraft instrument mechanic who was commissioned for his part in the 1973 coup. He may have subsequently washed out of pilot training in the USSR. Prior to the 1978 coup, he reportedly was transferred to the reserves for organizing Air Force officers in support of Taraki and played a key liaison role in organizing the 1978 coup. All party leaders were in jail at that time. He was made Minister of Communications in July 1978 and may not have been in the original Marxist Cabinet only because he was badly wounded during the coup. He disappeared—and may have fled to the USSR—after Amin overthrew Taraki. (b)(3)

Others

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Assadullah Sarwari, Deputy Prime Minister, Vice President of the Revolutionary Council

Assadullah, a former helicopter pilot trained in the USSR, assisted Amin with party organization prior to the 1978 coup. He was made director of the Department of National Protection—a secret police force reporting directly to the Prime Minister—after the Marxists seized control. In October 1978 his department was combined with similar organizations that had been under the Defense and Interior Ministries to form the Afghan Intelligence and Security Command (ACGSA). Soviet advisers were closely involved in ACGSA activities, perhaps more so than in any other part of the government. Assadullah headed ACGSA until the overthrow of Taraki in September 1979, when he went into hiding. The organization was renamed the Workers Intelligence Institute (KAM) and headed by President Amin's nephew. (b)(3)

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Soltan Ali Keshtmand, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Planning, Vice President of the Revolutionary Council

Keshtmand, 44, may have been given his fairly important posts in the government because he is unlikely to become a rival to Babrak. He is a Hazara in a nation where Pushtuns have always ruled, and a Shia in a predominately Sunni country. His factional loyalties in the party have been unclear, and he was able to accommodate himself enough to Amin and Taraki to escape the July 1978 purge, although he was dismissed as Minister of Planning and jailed during a second purge the following month. His confession published in September implicated Babrak in antigovernment plotting. (b)(3)

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Keshtmand was one of the original founders of the People's Democratic Party in 1965, and when the party split in 1967, apparently sided with Taraki's Khalqists. He was an unsuccessful candidate for Parliament in 1965, but was not so openly leftist to be denied government employment. He became director general of the economics section of the Ministry of Mines in 1965. (b)(3)

Shah Mohammad Dost, Foreign Minister

Dost, who entered the diplomatic service in 1956, was Deputy Foreign Minister under Amin. His influence in the ministry, however, apparently was slight because of his connections to the Parchamists. Dost has served in New York, Washington, Islamabad, and Peshawar and as chief of protocol in Kabul. (b)(1) (b)(3)

Faiz Mohammad, Minister of Borders and Tribes

Faiz Mohammad, about 36, is a Soviet-trained Army officer who helped overthrow the monarchy in 1973. He was rewarded with the Interior Ministry, but—probably as part of Daoud's efforts to eliminate leftists from the government—was later demoted to Frontier Affairs, and in 1977 appointed Ambassador to Djakarta. He apparently was not a member of the PDPA, but was regarded as a "good friend" by the Parchamists. He was named Ambassador to Baghdad after the Marxists gained power, but was later dismissed, presumably because of his Parchamist connections. (b)(3)

Mohammad Khan Jallalar, Minister of Trade

Jallalar, 44, is a hard-working, competent civil servant and is apparently apolitical with no known connections to the Parchamists. His family fled to Afghanistan in 1930, and he has some distant relatives in the USSR. He is an Uzbek, and possibly a Shia. (b)(3)

After graduating from Kabul University in 1958, Jallalar entered the Ministry of Planning. He was appointed Minister of Finance in 1972, in the last Cabinet under the monarchy. Five months after the King was overthrown, Daoud made him Minister of Commerce, a post he held until the Marxist coup in 1978. (b)(3)

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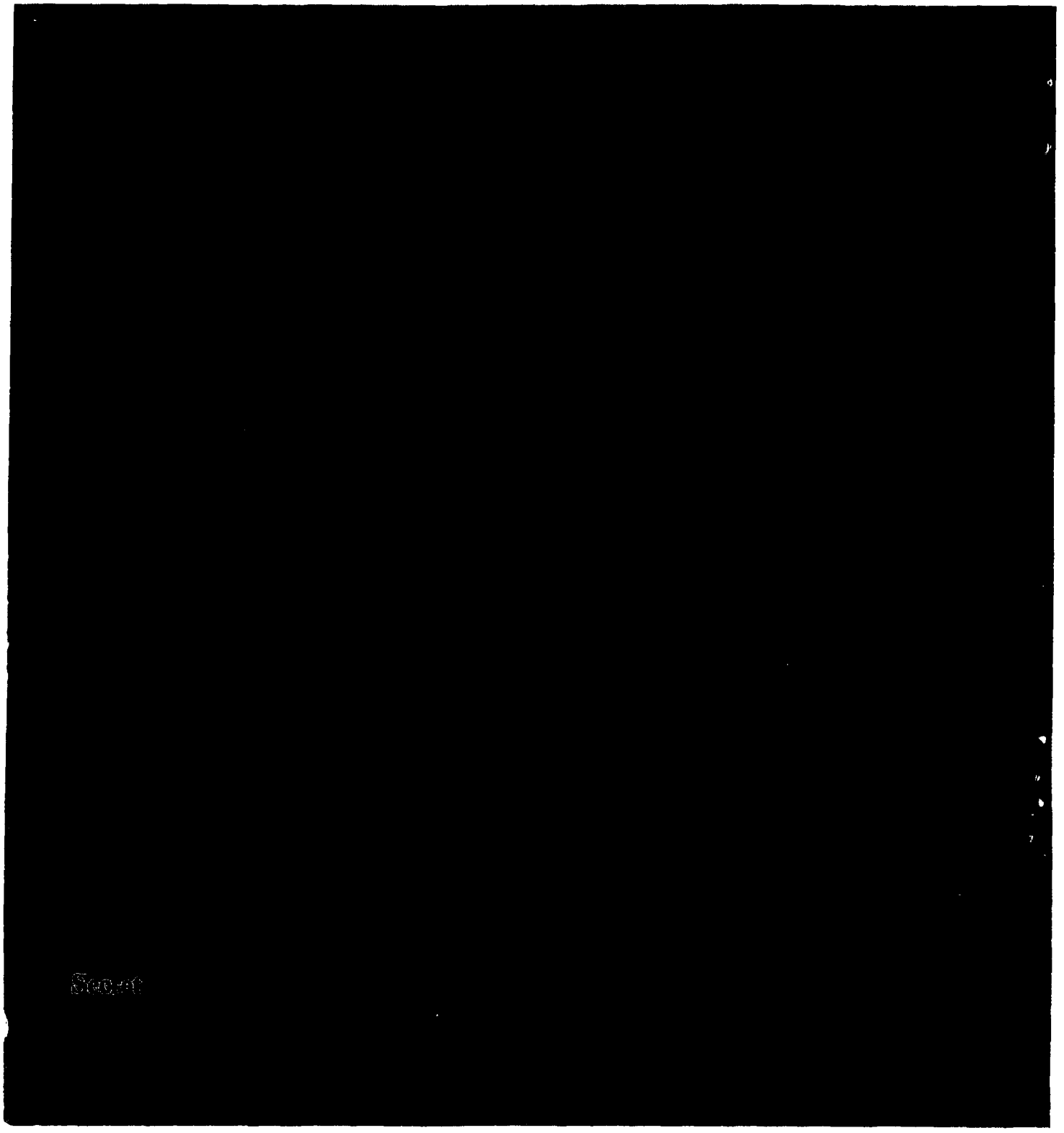

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